

let's make our ending from new beginnings by fakelight

Series: [we'll stay where we have gone \[2\]](#)

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Summary:

Will's humming under his breath, *it's a nice day for a white wedding*, and Joyce thinks about having a stern talk with her oldest about the type of music he puts on the mixtapes for his brother.

1. we're not damaged goods

The craziest thing about all of this, is that when Hopper came knocking on her door, sweating, his eyes wild, saying, "I need you to marry me," her answer was, "Okay."

Not, "You back on those pills, Hop?" or, "Once was enough, thanks," or even, "Yes," but, "Okay."

Now Joyce is on her way to the county clerk's office, wearing her nicest dress (forest green, worn once a year at the store Christmas party, white completely inappropriate for her station now) while Hop fidgets next to her, trying desperately to get his top button closed with one hand while the other steers.

She doesn't feel like a bride. But she's about to be one.

The plan was to get her into a loving home, hopefully in Hawkins, Eleven, or as they're calling her now, Eleanor Jane. Elle. El. (The emphasis is different, depending on who's speaking.) Joyce knows there are strings being pulled, somewhere, creating an official identity for this girl who saved them all. (No last name, yet.)

Scott, the boys' science teacher, is watching after her now, him and his new wife Jen, but it was always going to be a temporary solution.

It's only after Hop's sudden proposal does Joyce find out he'd asked to adopt her himself.

"They said it's too risky, me alone," he'd said, pacing, holding his hat in his hands. "But, maybe, if I was married . . ."

"I said okay, Hop," she'd replied, from the depths of her closet, trying to find the dress she's currently wearing. "You don't have to convince me."

"But it's not for me, you know, because I'm doing this for her."

Joyce knows that's a lie, that even if he doesn't realize it, he's doing it for himself too, maybe even for her, just like she's got her own reasons, but all she'd said was, "Well, now it feels like you're trying to talk me out of it."

It should feel like they're moving too fast, Joyce knows, but it feels like they're just picking up the thread, the one she'd dropped the day she decided to get herself in the backseat of Lonnie Byers' car, all those years ago, the backseat she feels, deep down, she's still trying to get out of.

They haven't said the words, the words you're supposed to say, preferably more than once, even, but Joyce reasons, is that even important? She doesn't need to hear them. She's had enough of words, of promises, never kept. What matters are actions. Deeds.

"I can't marry you if we're wrapped around that tree," she yelps as Hop jerks the wheel to the left, avoiding of all things, a caterpillar that's slowly making its way across the road. Sometimes she thinks she has him all figured out, the gruffness that doesn't go away, even when it's just them, the laconic temperament that is Jim Hopper, but then he does something like this, and she wonders just who this man she's been spending her time with is. The man she is, apparently, about to marry.

"Are your boys coming?" Hop asks, not looking over at her.

"I talked to Karen," Joyce confirms, "they'll meet us there." She finds it slightly amusing that both of her sons are in the same place, for very different reasons, but it's better than the alternative. The smile drops from her face, her mind flashing back to that week of not knowing, of imagining the worst. And then the knowing, and finding him, and the stillness of his chest . . .

Hop glances over, sees her spiraling. He knows, better than anyone, the reason why she's gone silent, the only person she lets see her like this, and puts his hand on top of where hers are twisting in her lap, lacing his fingers through hers. Joyce takes shallow breaths, willing herself calm. He doesn't say anything, but his grip is firm, and they stay like that until they arrive, pulling her hand from his in anticipation of the rush.

As he turns the car off, Joyce goes to release the catch on her seat belt, letting it slide through her fingers. She's got one foot out the door when she looks over. He isn't moving.

"Hop?"

"I should've," he mutters, and shakes his head, his eyes focused on the building in front of them. He's not talking to her, he's talking to someone that's not there, not anymore, Joyce can tell. All her worries, and she didn't even notice his. Guilt flows over her like a wave.

She says his name.

He looks over at her, like he's just remembered she's in the car.

"Maybe we shouldn't do this," he says, haltingly.

It's the first time she's ever heard him sound hesitant.

Joyce presses the seat belt back into its latch, yanks her door shut. They're past turning back now.

"Drive around the block."

"What?" He sounds confused, which Joyce figures is better than wary.

"Around the block, Hop. Drive around it. I'm not going to say it again."

He turns the car on.

They go around the block, twice. Joyce waits.

On the third pass, he starts talking.

Notes for the Chapter:

Me, finding out the state of Indiana has no waiting period after applying for a marriage license: "Oh no."

2. maybe we're just lonely people

"Maybe we shouldn't be doing this," he says again.

"You said that before. I put on a dress, Hop. A dress. You're going to need to give me a better reason than *maybe*."

He's silent again, taciturn, and Joyce wonders if maybe he's right, that this was a bad idea after all. All of it, not just her forcing him to drive in circles. There's a metaphor there, she thinks, but she can't get distracted, not right now.

"You lose them," he grits out.

"Lose who?"

"I gave her up. Because I couldn't save her. You can't save them, Joyce."

Joyce feels something prickling up her back, but she isn't sure if it's fear, or something else.

"You're trying to tell me we didn't fight and win to get my son back, not once, but twice?" Joyce realizes it's anger, her voice livid.

"No, no, not like that," he says, trailing off, his head jerking quickly from side to side. "But it's all so . . . there's no . . . I don't know. What could happen. What's coming. For them. For us. For all of us."

He pulls into a parking spot directly in front of the courthouse, the car skidding quickly to a stop.

"Of course we don't know, you think I expected, well, any of this?" Joyce doesn't know if she means Will himself, or Hop, or whatever her life has become since the day her son disappeared.

"It's just," he pauses, "we got them back. But who's to say why, or for how long?"

She only has a vague inkling of what he's involved in. She knows that sacrifices were made, and that there are people he's beholden to

somehow, but they got Will back, and then they got Eleven—El—back, and Will doesn't have that *thing* in him anymore, and so she puts up with his dealings, the ones she knows nothing about.

"But we got her, Hop," she says, her voice soft. "We got them both. They're here, we're here. Everything's back to normal."

Hop keeps looking straight forward, his fists tight around the steering wheel.

"We can't always save them. She could . . ."

Joyce realizes he's speaking in pronouns, not saying names, and the realization of who *she* really is causes her breath to hitch. There's nothing she can say in response to that, not really, so she takes his hand in hers, pulling it from the wheel, pressing it tightly. A squeeze is her only response.

They both know what it's like to lose.

But there's a chance here, for him, to regain. Not replace, never replace, but a second chance. She knows what it's like to find, to be found. And if she can give him this chance, she will.

"We have to do this," Joyce says. It's not enough, but what words are?

"For El. For us," she continues. "I know they can get lost. I know *you* can get lost. I know what you can lose. But, Hop," she says, taking her fingers and lacing them through his, "it's worth it, isn't it?"

When he turns his head to look at her, she can see the uncertainty in his eyes, but she doesn't look away. They did this together before, they can do it again. She gives him a small, tight smile, one he eventually returns, taking his strength from her.

"It's you and me, Hop," Joyce says. "We got this."

"We got this," he repeats after her, still uncertain, but stronger. It's enough.

Hop moves to open the car door, but Joyce tightens her grip, holding him in place.

“Just one more thing,” she tells him. “You said your, before.”

Hop looks at her, uncomprehending.

“Your boys. That’s what you said. It’s going to be *our*, in a few minutes. Are you ready for that?”

“Fuck,” Hop swears, but there’s no edge to it. Joyce smiles faintly as he raises an eyebrow. “I guess I’ll have to be. And you’re getting a daughter, are you ready for that?”

“Girls I can handle. I was one, at some point.” She’d meant it as a joke, but Hop frowns.

“You’re right. I probably should have done this a different way,” he says, his eyes low. “Down on one knee, or something.”

Joyce scoffs out a laugh at the image of Hop kneeling down in front of her, a velvet box in his hand. That isn’t them. Getting caught up in each other is for young lovers, for the girl she used to be. What they have is realistic. Real.

“Maybe more than five minutes notice would have been nice, but,” Joyce smiles, “we’re here now. It’s us.”

“But it wasn’t fair to you. I should have done more. I should tell you, how much . . . I just . . . “

“Hop, it’s fine. It’s not important. We’re here,” Joyce says, apprehensive of where he’s going with this.

“No. I should . . . I haven’t even said,” and he pauses, and Joyce feels like she’s fighting to breathe all of a sudden, like Will must have, before they came back, before it was all over. Hop’s looking down into his hands, like he’s searching for something, and Joyce hopes it’s courage, because he has to say it, she doesn’t know why she thought otherwise, she has to hear it, he has to -

“I love you.”

It's quiet, and it's brusque, but it's *him*.

"Christ, took you long enough," Joyce breathes, and then she's kissing him.

They're interrupted by a long blast of a car horn, and Joyce turns to see a veritable clown car of people spilling out of the familiar brown sedan that has pulled up next to them, Will pressing on the wheel from the back seat.

Jonathan knocks on her window.

"Hey Mom, what's up? What are we doing here?" he asks, his voice muffled.

Nancy appears next to him, peering into the car.

"Sorry Mrs. Byers, my mom didn't really explain anything, but all of the boys wanted to come for some reason. I can take them back to my house if you don't want them here," Nancy says with a knowing look that says at the very least, she's aware of what they're doing.

Joyce turns back to Hop, and raises an eyebrow.

"You ready for this?" he asks.

"Let's get married," she replies, grinning.

Notes for the Chapter:

My sincere apologies for disappearing for so long.

3. a nice day to start again

Joyce isn't proud that she knows Indiana marriage licenses can be used the same day they are applied for, but this is the second time in her life that fact has come in handy, so in the end, her pride doesn't really matter. Or so she tells herself.

Hop has a judge friend (because all cops have judge friends), so their unexpectedly enormous group mills around in the hallway outside his chambers while they wait for him to finish up with whatever it is judges do. Will's humming under his breath, *it's a nice day for a white wedding*, and Joyce thinks about having a stern talk with her oldest about the type of music he puts on the mixtapes for his brother.

After the first half hour goes by, Nancy pulls her into the bathroom and does something twisty that Joyce could never have accomplished alone to her hair, pulling bobby pins from her own short bob to keep it in place.

"Thank you," Joyce says to Nancy's reflection in the mirror. "And don't get any ideas," she warns, trying to keep the amusement out of her voice, "one surprise marriage per year, okay?"

"Oh, um," Nancy stammers, which is basically the reaction Joyce had been hoping for.

Jonathan is missing when they exit the bathroom, and for a heart-stopping moment Joyce is sure he left because he doesn't *approve*. She's about to call the whole thing off when he walks back down the hallway, Eleven a few steps ahead of him, and all Joyce can do is pull him into the tightest hug she can give.

"Mom," he whines after it goes on for too long, but Joyce doesn't let go. She hears Nancy laugh over her shoulder, and she knows that her son has the most exasperated expression on his face, he gets it from her, but he's her *boy*, her first, and she may not have raised him right

but clearly he's turned out okay.

"Thank you for getting her," she says, releasing him.

"I just," he shrugs, "figured she should be here. I mean, we're all doing this for her, right?"

Joyce is about to correct him, *she's* the one doing something, but of course, he's right. His life is going to be turned, well, upside down, just as much as hers is. But as she looks around, at the boys who have run over and are chatting animatedly at Eleven, who has a faint hint of a smile on her face, to Nancy, who's tucked herself into Jonathan's side, pressing her lips to his cheek, to Hop, who regards all of them with a frown that only Joyce seems to recognize as how he projects fondness, love, even, Joyce knows that they wouldn't be here today without this girl, this incredible girl. She saved them, even as they'd saved her.

Joyce kneels next to Eleven, who's just finished up a whispered conversation with Hopper, as much of a conversation one can have with a girl who still barely speaks more than two words in a row.

"Hey," she says quietly, Eleven turning her head quickly in surprise. Joyce is reminded of a bird, the way her shoulders tighten, as if to protect herself.

"Hop told you?"

A quick nod.

"And that's okay? You'd want to . . ." Joyce is cut off by the vehemence of Eleven's voice, all of her emotion put into a single word.

"Yes."

A hug is out of the question, but Joyce takes Eleven's hands in hers, squeezing softly, trying to convey everything she's feeling—love, warmth, protection—as Hop kneels down next to her. His mouth jerks upward, a flash of a smile, gone in an instant, but his hand is on Eleven's shoulder, the other pulling Joyce to him, and Will is grinning over at them, and for the first time since Joyce can

remember she isn't afraid of what's coming.

A man in judges robes rounds the corner, blinking as he sees the number of people waiting outside his chambers.

Hopper takes two tries to stand, his legs betraying his nerves, and Joyce takes pity on him, clasping his hand tightly, holding him upright.

"You should have brought the shotgun," Jonathan whispers to Nancy, and then winces as she elbows him.

The ceremony itself is short, over in the blink of an eye. Joyce cries, of course, as do Nancy and Dustin, and Joyce can't help but feel strange when she calls him *James*, he's Hop, she doesn't know who this James person is. And when it's all over and done, when they've kissed and Eleven and the boys have pelted them with rice and Jonathan has captured them turning to each other and smiling, Joyce feels an overwhelming sense of rightness, that this is where she belongs, where she's always belonged. Her sons and her daughter and her husband and her, all of them, together.

"So, Mom," Will asks, "where are we going to live?"

Hop looks taken aback, like he hadn't even considered this. Joyce shakes her head. Married five minutes and she's already running the household by herself.

"You'll move in with your brother, and El will take your room," Joyce says, preemptively raising her hand at the noises of protest that come from both of her sons, even as Eleven perks up, a look of delight on her face. "He'll be gone soon anyway, or at least, he'd better be."

Jonathan frowns at her.

"You'll be in *college*," she reminds him. "Then, Will, you'll have your own room again, and everyone will be happy."

Will looks uncertain, mostly at her pronouncement of their happiness, but Joyce shrugs it off. She got married today.

She's allowed to have some hope for the future.

Notes for the Chapter:

Title from The Most Serene Republic's [Phages](#).
Chapter titles from Orla Gartland's [Lonely People](#) and
Billy Idol's [White Wedding](#).